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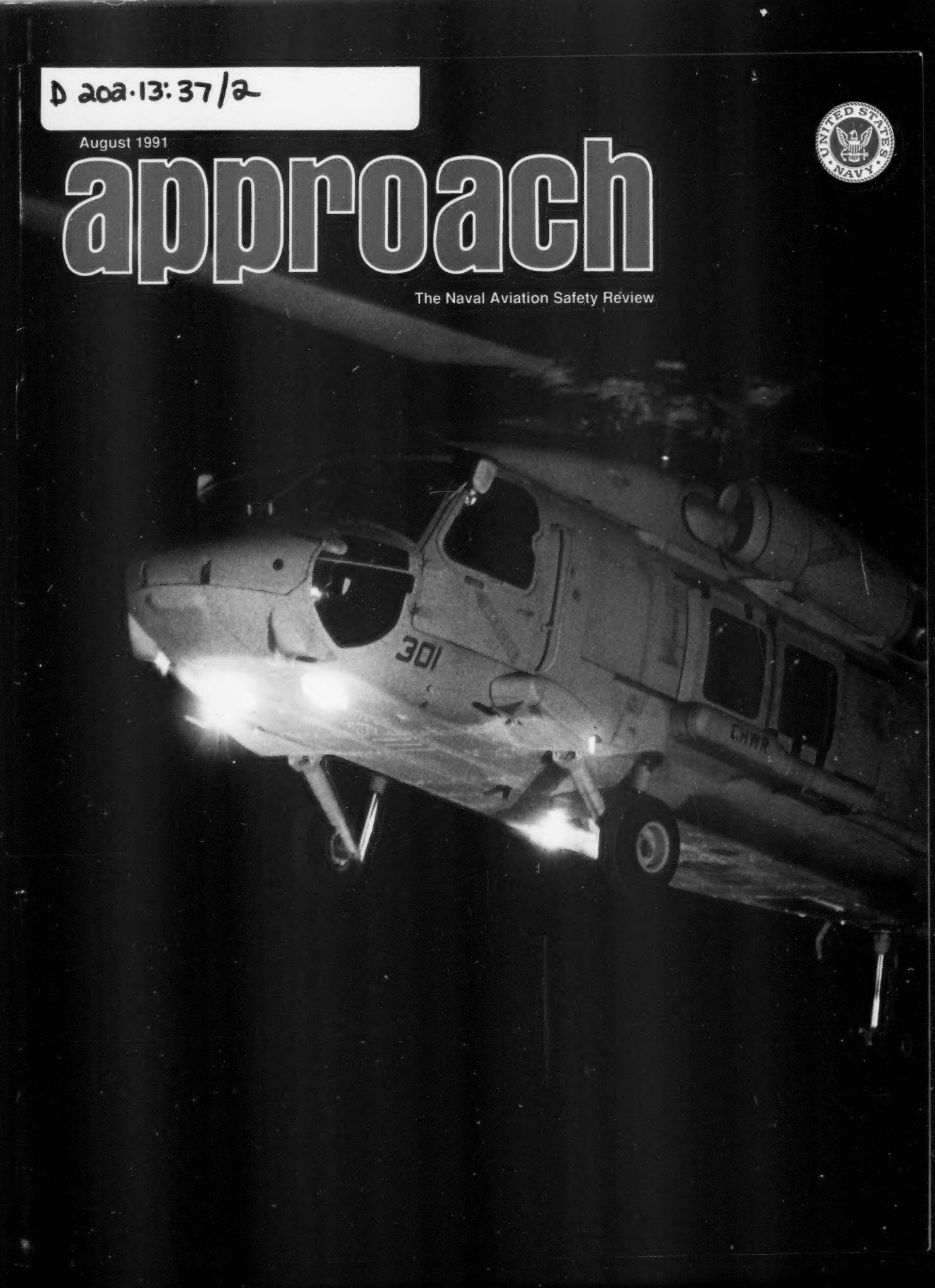
August 1991

approach

The Naval Aviation Safety Review



Editorial

When We Fly, We Are All Equal

By Lt. A.S. Miskiewicz

During a night mission, the helicopter aircraft commander (HAC) suddenly takes control from his startled copilot and enters a hard turn.

"Look out for that P-3!" he exclaims. The copilot had been watching a flare descending on a parachute and was confused as he searched for the traffic. Smarting from the HAC's rough treatment, the copilot forgets his backup instrument scan duties and lets the HAC, now fixated on the flare, fly them into the water.

In broad daylight, another helo crew has finished a logistics support mission from shore to ship. They are preparing for the last flight back to the ship. The fuel gauge is below the 20-minute reserve point and the crew quickly discusses whether they can make it back to the ship, which is in sight a few miles offshore.

The copilot, who has more time in-type, advises against the attempt but lets the HAC go ahead. If they shut down, the ship will have to bring fuel ashore via small boat, and they'll probably have to spend the night. Fortunately, the flight is made at sufficient autorotation altitude; a dual-engine flameout splashes them just short of homeplate. All three crewmen survive but the Navy has one less helicopter.

A charter transport begins an approach to the air station slightly steeper and faster than normal, causing the copilot to report the developing unsafe condition to the captain who is flying the approach. The captain shruggs off the warnings and the copilot resigns himself to going along for the ride.

"Maybe things will turn out OK," he thinks. They crash moments later; the voice recorder documents the copilot's emphatic "I told you so!" as they slide off the edge of the runway.

What is it that allows the pilot who is not at the controls to be "just along for the ride"? In most cases, the copilot is the junior member of the crew; he trusts and respects the experience and skill of his senior. When this respect turns into intimidation, crew coordination goes out the window with costly results. Aircraft commanders are often guilty of perpetuating the myth that they are all-knowing, while waiting for that guy in the next seat to get with it. Seniority has its place but it should not be overdone.

Vladimar Antipov, a 28-year-old Soviet Air Force captain, was recently quoted in *U.S. News and World Report:* "You'll notice we don't wear badges of rank on our flight suits. When we fly, we are all equal."

Lt. Miskiewicz is an H-2 Pilot with HSL-35.

Antipov's statement may be wishful thinking for the Soviet Air Force, but that doesn't mean it isn't a good goal.–Ed.

approach

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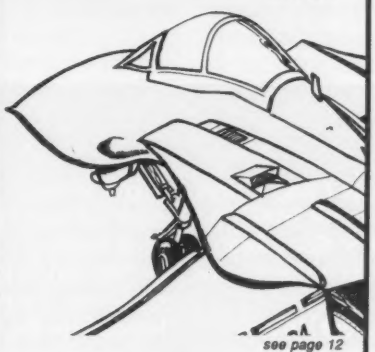

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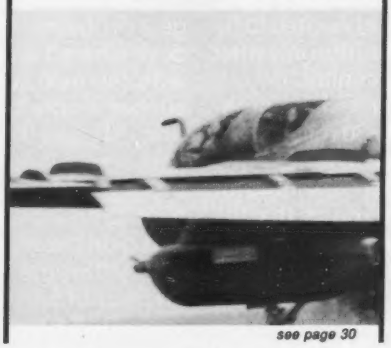

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On the cover: An HH-60H of Naval Air Reserve Squadron HCS-5. This month is the 75th anniversary of the Naval Air Reserve. (Photo by George Hall)

Correction:
The article, "Who's Trying To Kill Us?" in the June *Approach* was written by Lt. Rick St. John, not LCdr. Guy St. John.

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Cdr. John D. Reid, Head, Media and Educational Support
Lt. Steve Halsted, Editor
Peter Mersky, Asst. Editor
John Williams, Acting Art Director
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The Milk Run

By Capt. T. Longo, USMC

PH3 Tracy Lee Didas

On the Marine Corps' birthday, I was a new helicopter aircraft commander (HAC) on my first deployment. USS *Guadalcanal* (LPH-11) was returning from Puerto Rico during our pre-Mediterranean workup.

As the most junior officer and newest HAC of our detachment of CH-53Es, I had not yet had the thrill of flying as aircraft commander. All of the missions had always been too important, the cargo too expensive, or the night too dark to be trusted to a boot like me.

I had a mission that was just right for my first HAC ride from the ship: I would launch on a severe-clear VFR day to follow the det OINC as his wingman to an aircraft carrier. Then, I'd orbit in starboard delta while he landed and embarked passengers. I was supposed to follow him back to mother and land in time to eat the large birthday dinner that the wardroom was preparing.

One takeoff, one landing. Keep up, shut up. Don't mess up and we'll let you do this again. Child's play.

I was sitting in the right seat because I wanted to fly the only landing that we would make and the only man who wasn't a HAC in our det was my copilot.

We launched and found the carrier with no problem. We were happy that she was only 30 miles away and that the weather was beautiful because land was 200 miles away. We had 3.5 hours of fuel remaining for the 15-minute return trip. I should have known that the flight was going too smoothly. I should have remembered all of those safety articles that began with, "It was going to be a milk run..."

While the carrier shot its jets off, we circled over the Atlantic. We watched the jets recover. My flight lead asked to land, commenting that he wouldn't be on deck for more than a minute. The carrier told him to keep holding.

We didn't know that the carrier and mother were steaming away from each other. The carrier was headed for the Indian Ocean and *Guadalcanal* had an appointment off the coast of Camp Lejeune.

We had had a British helo join on us, and he now told the Boss that he was having avionics trouble. They told him to continue holding, too.

We watched a fighter with lost communications be led to the ship by his wingman. All the other planes landed.

Lead asked for pigeons and weather at mother and was told that she was VFR and 40 miles away. I couldn't receive Mother's TACAN and should have realized that she had to be farther away. I also chose to ignore the lightning strikes on the horizon in mother's direction.

The Brit declared a fuel emergency and navigation gear problems. He received clearance to land after the deck cleared a spot. Most of the deck was cluttered with the next wave of jets. My auxiliary tanks were almost empty but I still had enough fuel for the trip home. I knew that we were late and would be the only helicopters landing at mother. She would recover us quickly. My aux tanks drained as the British helo aligned his inertial nav. He had to return home EMCON and didn't want to miss it so far from land.

By the time my lead got permission to land, I had an hour of fuel left. I could make it, but being accustomed to having more than four hours of fuel, I was *not* accustomed to fuel management. I had only seen a

low-fuel caution light once in my short career.

My copilot flew a CCA to the ship's stern where he was asked to "call the ball." No one had the slightest idea what that meant. Again, we heard, "Call the ball."

I looked at my copilot who looked back at me. I told him just to say, "Ball."

"Roger. Good ball. Cleared to land," replied the voice.

"I don't know what all that was about," I said, "but I guess we can land now."

Obviously, I had not studied carrier procedures enough. I assumed that a ship was a ship and that the terminology would be the same.

The purple shirts seemed to take an inordinate amount of time attaching the hose and the Boss asked me whether I wanted fuel. My crew chief said that the fuel samples were taking longer than usual.

"Fuel samples?" I asked. "We don't need fuel samples. The major just took fuel and it was OK. Let's start pumping and get out of here."

The first lucky thing that happened to me all day was that my crew chief knew better. The Boss finally said that I would have to take off and wait in starboard delta if I didn't take fuel *now*. I told my copilot that the Boss could fly this plane if he wanted it to leave but we needed fuel. I also was not about to go into the endless void of starboard D with no fuel and a waning crew day. That was my first smart move.

The flow light illuminated but we were taking fuel slowly for some reason. I let the Boss intimidate me and I stopped at three hours worth of fuel. My flight leader asked my state and told me to take a full bag, 4.5 hours. By then, the hose was gone and the Boss was screaming at me to clear his deck. I had some static on the radio and could see lightning on the horizon in the direction of our ship.

As I prepared to lift from the fantail and pedal-turn for a departure, the Boss cleared me down the deck. I finally had enough gas to fly the 40 miles and felt good. I wanted to show these fighter pukes what a real machine could do. I asked the Boss if he wanted me to do a hover-and-go, or a rolling takeoff.

"Just a normal takeoff," my lead said.

Again, I was saved from my ignorance because I never thought about the damage that the arresting gear might do to my landing gear if I tried a rolling takeoff.

The darkness at the end of the ship surprised my copilot and me as we left the bright lights of the flight deck. My copilot remembered to assist with altitude, airspeed and VSI calls. I started my instrument scan and called the gear. That's when I realized that we hadn't briefed a night rendezvous over the water. I was cleared right across the carrier's bow and to join my lead in starboard delta. I turned right and tried to adjust to the darkness. The whole crew saw lead's red anti-collision lights but I couldn't see his position lights and couldn't determine his direction of flight.

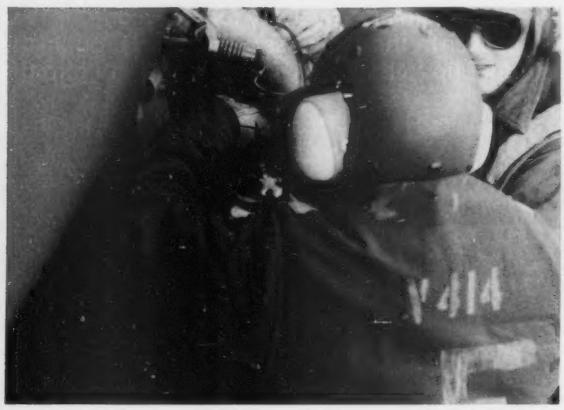
"OK," my copilot said, "I tally on the lead."

"Does anyone know if he's coming at us or going away?" I asked. The silence sent a flash of panic through me.

I asked again. Still no response. Suddenly, the crew chief screamed, "He's coming right at us!"

I saw the red lights of the lead's cockpit and yanked the collective with all my might and banked right. My space-shuttle climb brought me toward the ship's bow and I turned left. My lead was nowhere in sight. My mouth went dry and I swallowed my gum. Every time I had been in a tight situation, I had always looked to the salty HAC for guidance. This time, though, everyone was looking at *me*, and I knew we were in trouble.

The first mech called the lead at our seven o'clock and moving away from us. I gradually turned left and began my descent from 2,000 feet. The lead's naviga-



"Fuel samples?" I asked. "We don't need fuel samples. The major just took fuel and it was OK. Let's start pumping and get out of here."

JOCS Kirby Harrison

...I seemed to be getting closer but the lead must have reduced his speed below 80 knots because I seemed to be hurtling at a stationary object. Was he descending, too?

tion lights were either broken or too dim to see. He was far away but I knew that I should close the gap quickly. I spotted the red tail light and tried a running rendezvous by using power rather than radius of turn.

I had no depth perception of the little red dot surrounded by black. I increased my speed but didn't seem to close the gap. Even when I asked him to slow his airspeed, the gap remained constant.

At last, I seemed to be getting closer but the lead must have reduced his speed below 80 knots because I seemed to be hurtling at a stationary object. Was he descending, too?

I pulled my nose up to prevent an over run and the pedals started acting weird.

"What the hell is he doing?" I said.

"Sir," my crew chief replied, "you're not trying to join on that ship, are you?"

I was at 1,000 feet and my airspeed was below 40 knots and heading rapidly toward zero. The AFCS had dropped its coordinated turn-and-balanced flight modes. Pushing the nose down to level and instinctively pulling power uncaged the gyro in my head. I thought that we were in a descending right turn even though the gauges said we were in a climbing left turn. Vertigo paralyzed me. I was leaning against the window and I was trying not to vomit.

The copilot tried to talk me out of my vertigo but I had to give him control. He flew straight and level while I caught my breath.

The crew chief said, "Sir, I'm scared."

"Me, too," the first mech said.

I was in command and felt helpless. The copilot saw the lead and began to join on him but couldn't fly close enough to effectively fly form at night. He was badly shaken by the near miss of the boat. I brought the crew chief up to the jump seat and showed him the gauges.

"The bar alt is on," I told him. "The wings are level and the VSI is zero. We'll be OK."

I regained my composure and took charge. I think that I soothed the crew but the crew chief sat next to me for the rest of the flight and told me every time we exceeded a descent rate of 200 fpm.

During the rendezvous, we oscillated between being terribly sucked and a closure rate that threatened a collision. With no depth perception, we couldn't judge the closure rate until the lead helo was about to come through our windscreen, which was naturally

followed by our radically reducing power and climbing.

After trying to coach my copilot into a close cruise formation—it was too much for him—I finally took control and flew the helo to within three rotors of the lead. That was worse than any spatial disorientation training I had received. I relinquished control and switched to cold mike so that my crew wouldn't hear me being sick.

After our joinup, lead asked for weather and pigeons to mother. Sixty miles and VFR. Neither of us had the ship's TACAN until they told us to switch to another frequency not on our list.

I learned about presence of mind that night. The lead refused to be passed off until we had a positive lock on mother.

The lightning seemed to be striking more rapidly and was bright enough to make me see spots. Thirty miles from the carrier, my TACAN needle wobbled and the DME spun, then locked solid. We were 45 miles from home, 30 miles from a ship that didn't want us and was moving quickly toward the IO, and we were 200 miles from land.

Our air controller's voice was music to our ears—until we asked him about the weather. Mother was zero-zero and blowing the fog horn. I felt like I was living a nightmare out of flight school. How many times had I heard an instructor drill me about, "What if? What if?"

My silent reply had always been, "Yeah, like all that stuff is really going to happen at once."

The ship put us on a 40-mile arc around the thunder cell and we descended to remain VFR. When we hit the driving rain, my copilot got vertigo and I took control. Our wipers were thrashing the windshield but I could barely see the lead. He asked for separate squawks and altitudes *in case* we inadvertently went IFR. I just wanted to get home and he was worried about shooting an approach. The controller sounded annoyed that we were questioning his ability to vector us through good weather.

"Just give us the squawks and altitudes, please," lead said.

We re-briefed inadvertent IFR over the radio. Later, I was told that the crew of the lead helo kept losing sight of us even though we were no more than three rotors away.

My crew chief was checking my VSI over his shoulder as he watched the lead. I was following the little red light. I called for lead to turn all of his lights, including his formation lights, to full bright. Even after he did so, I could still see only the upper rotating light. Then even that disappeared and I called, "Popeye!"

We made an IFR breakup and climbed to 1,500 feet. Lead flew to 2,000 feet. How could this get worse? I had only shot a couple of approaches to a ship and those were always during the day. We had two hours of fuel but nobody seemed to know when Mother would find better weather. We were still on a 40-mile arc around the ship, my copilot had vertigo, my crew was terrified, the turbulence was starting to scare me, I was in charge, and I had no more *gum.*

My aircraft had the least fuel so I took the first approach. At five miles, I couldn't see the ship even though she had every light turned on to full intensity. We broke out of the clouds at three miles and 400 feet. The sky and water around the shining ship looked like black satin.

The ship cleared me to spot 5 and I shuddered a little when the copilot secured the bar alt hold. I waffled over the spot once and got the signal to land, but I wanted to be perfect. I knew that the lead had to land behind me. I also knew everyone was watching.

"Just put it anywhere on the deck, *sir!*" I guess the crew chief had had enough. I put it down.

Once we were both shut down and folded, the voice of the ship's captain congratulated us on the radio. I later discovered that pri-fly and HDC were SRO during our adventure. The birthday dinner was cold and the sparkling grape juice was flat, but I ate the best piece of Marine Corps birthday cake in my life.

I learned about planning and lax attitudes that day. The importance of an instrument scan has forever been chiseled into my brain. I have flown some easy missions and some difficult missions since then, but I will never fly a milk run again. ◀

Capt. Longo is a CH-53E pilot with HMM-162.

CW02 Ed Bailey

"Just put it anywhere on the deck, *sir!*" I guess the crew chief had had enough. I put it down.

Good Plan, Bad Probe

By Cdr. Phillip H. Mills

I was a "stash ensign," on my way to my first fleet squadron. I was on the first leg of a return cross-country from NAS Southeast to NAS West Coast in my TA-4J. I had planned my fuel down to the last hundred pounds, considering the predicted winds, to get home in two legs. I had planned a mid-leg divert at East Texas AFB in case winds, fuel or Texas West AFB weather didn't go according to plan.

My contingency plan was to contact East Texas Metro as I passed 75 miles north to check destination weather. If the weather was 1,000 and 3 or better—as was forecast—and I had 4,000 pounds of fuel, I would continue to Texas West, which was my final destination. I would land with no less than 1,200 pounds. If I had worse weather or less than 4,000 pounds, I would divert to East Texas.

At my check point, things were perfect. My drops were dry, I was reading 4,200 pounds internal, Metro said Texas West was clear and 7+ miles, and there wasn't a cloud between me and the West Coast. Good plan, well executed. I pressed.

Remembering what I had learned in the training command, I checked my fuel every five minutes and updated my on-deck estimate. As East Texas disappeared behind me, a disturbing thing began to happen. While my ground speed seemed to be the same, i.e., no change in the winds, my on-deck fuel estimate started to decrease by about 100 pounds every five minutes.

After 15 minutes, I was sure I could *see* the fuel gauge moving. I actually made a hard turn to check for a fuel leak. No leak, not even a contrail. Now I could feel the corner creeping up behind me. I was midway between my divert and my destination, and estimating 800 pounds on-deck with fuel going down faster than the fuel flow said it should.

"All right, settle down," I told myself. "I must be figuring this wrong. Five more minutes and I'll figure the fuel again. Meanwhile I'll pull out the chart and look for a good divert. If the fuel still looks bad, it's too late to turn back to East Texas anyway. I'll have to find somewhere nearby to land."

Bad news. There wasn't one field—civilian or military—on the chart between me and Texas West. More bad news: I was now estimating 600 pounds on deck.

"Hello, Houston Center," I called, "I have a low-fuel emergency."

I pressed on to Texas West on a max-range descent, checking the several long, straight highways along the way—just in case. Twenty miles from West, approach told me that West Muni was only 10 miles at 11 o'clock. With 400 pounds on the gauge, I took it, entered a right base and landed with 300 pounds showing.

The last thing I wanted to do was tell anyone at home how badly I'd screwed this up. Fortunately, I couldn't avoid it since I had to explain why I landed at West Muni and why I couldn't get my jet home on time. (No gas, no huffer...)

How I got the fuel and a huffer on a Sunday afternoon is another story. Nevertheless, the next morning, I landed at home as the field opened, this time with 4,000 pounds on the fuel gauge.

You've probably guessed that I now encourage more conservative fuel management, but that's only part of the point. The day I returned, no less than five other pilots told me they had had similar low-fuel problems in that same aircraft, all beginning right after the main bag started to burn down. Before noon, we had convinced the MO to down the aircraft. The next day, the electricians found a bad fuel probe in one of the wing tanks. It turned out that I really landed with about 1,000 pounds.

None of the six pilots who had had this problem wanted to tell anyone we had screwed up. We just vowed never to push our fuel quite that low again. As a result, this TA-4 flew with this problem for more than six months! No one confessed until someone got caught.

Most squadrons have gotten better over the years. My last two had regular "true confessions," where pilots *voluntarily* shared their sea stories at an APM. We also used Anymouse forms, sent Hazard Reports, and wrote to *Approach* to share our experiences with others. When you have a close call, tell somebody. No matter what means you choose, your experience can save someone's life, not to mention an expensive aircraft. Share the experience! ◀

Cdr. Mills was the CO of VFA-146, flying F/A-18s. He is currently assigned to the staff of COMCRUDESGRU-3.

How I Almost Squashed a GUPPY

By Lt. J.A. Causey

One Saturday morning, at 0715, I walked across the ramp toward my jet for my first FAM solo. The weather looked marginal, but hey, I was a player and would get the "X." A hole to the north in the 10,000-foot broken layer over the field would be my VFR corridor to the MOA.

After takeoff, the corridor led only to a broken layer at 13,000 feet and an overcast at 16,000 feet. So much for acro. What would I do for 45 minutes with my very own jet and two full drop tanks?

Sightseeing between cloud layers in an empty MOA grew surprisingly tedious, so I was glad to see the fuel low enough to return to base for lots of much-needed landing practice.

After landing number five on runway 05R, I felt comfortable. The runway duty officer hadn't yelled at me. He hadn't said a word. In fact, I had the entire pattern to myself. I began practicing precautionary emergency landings (PELs). My fourth PEL was not as easy as the preceding three.

. . .I was shocked to hear the runway duty officer, followed by the tower, yell, "In the groove! Waveoff! Waveoff!"

JOCS Kirby Harrison

When I was at 2,000 feet at the 180, the tower said, "104, cleared on the left."

"104 on the left," I replied. I dropped the nose and aimed at the target flair point several hundred feet before the threshold of runway 05 right. The PEL was going well so I was shocked to hear the runway duty officer, followed by the tower, yell, "In the groove! Waveoff! Waveoff!"

I began my waveoff as tower called, "125, extend upwind. 104, you are cleared downwind." I had a sinking feeling inside. Did I go to the wrong runway, or did tower clear two airplanes to the same runway?" I put the thought out of my mind and made the required landings for the FAM mission.

The details, as I discovered in the quiet, Saturday morning atmosphere of the ready room, were not pleasant. By not paying attention to the runway clearance, I had come within feet of smashing belly first into a classmate, below my PEL profile, on short final. I got the "X," as well as a flight down, which was quickly resolved to be "sorry headwork, solid airwork. Press on."

It was no fun facing my classmate. How could I explain that I almost killed him? I learned a lesson that I have never forgotten: to be a good aviator, you've got to pay attention. ◄

Lt. Causey is an E-2 pilot with VAW-127.

Kevin Miller

We're a month-and-a-half into the cruise; the historic port of Subic Bay and the famous "Cubi Special" are only a week away. Although I'm still a nugget, I'm starting to see a tinge of salt on the ol' flight suit. I've made all the workups. Hey! I've even made a two-month PACEX deployment. Yeah, I'm a regular fleet guy. Tonight I'm even getting my centurion trap. Won't that look good on my jacket.

I have the night overhead tanker hop. The air plan shows plenty of gas airborne. I figured that I probably have to dump 5,000 pounds just to land. Weather doesn't look too bad—scattered to broken layers from 2,000 to 8,000 feet, and a beautiful half-moon. Piece of cake. Looks like two hours of flight time just to get set up for a perfect centurion trap.

Wham! You've got to love those heavy tanker cat shots. Attitude set, gauges all turning the right way, gear handle up. Nose gear up, left main up, right main...barberpole unsafe. Ooops! I keep it below gear speed and climb through the clouds. Probably just a faulty indicator, but I should let a rep in air ops know.

We have a brief discussion. I drop my gear and, sure enough, three down-and-locked. Am I a pro or what? Mistake number 1: I just trapped 6,000 pounds of fuel in my drop tanks. With three down-and-locked (and they were sure going to stay that way) the jet won't transfer gas from the drops unless you remove power from the secondary DC bus. So, I have another, longer conversation with my rep about how I am going to have to turn off a perfectly good generator.

I put out the emergency power package (EPP), listen to it wind up, look fondly at the moon, and turn off my generator. Some lights go out; others get dimmer. My heart rate goes up but

MY CENTURION TRAP

By Lt. Kevin L. Duggan

the EPP works as advertised. The drop tanks begin to transfer. I shake my head the whole time, thinking, "Boy! I should have known that about the transfer. Bet I sounded stupid."

Suddenly, I don't feel like the salty pilot I thought I was. However, air ops gives me a chance to redeem myself. They tell me they want me to land at the end of the ongoing recovery. No problem, a chance to look like a player. I reply with my saltiest, "Roger." Mistake number 2.

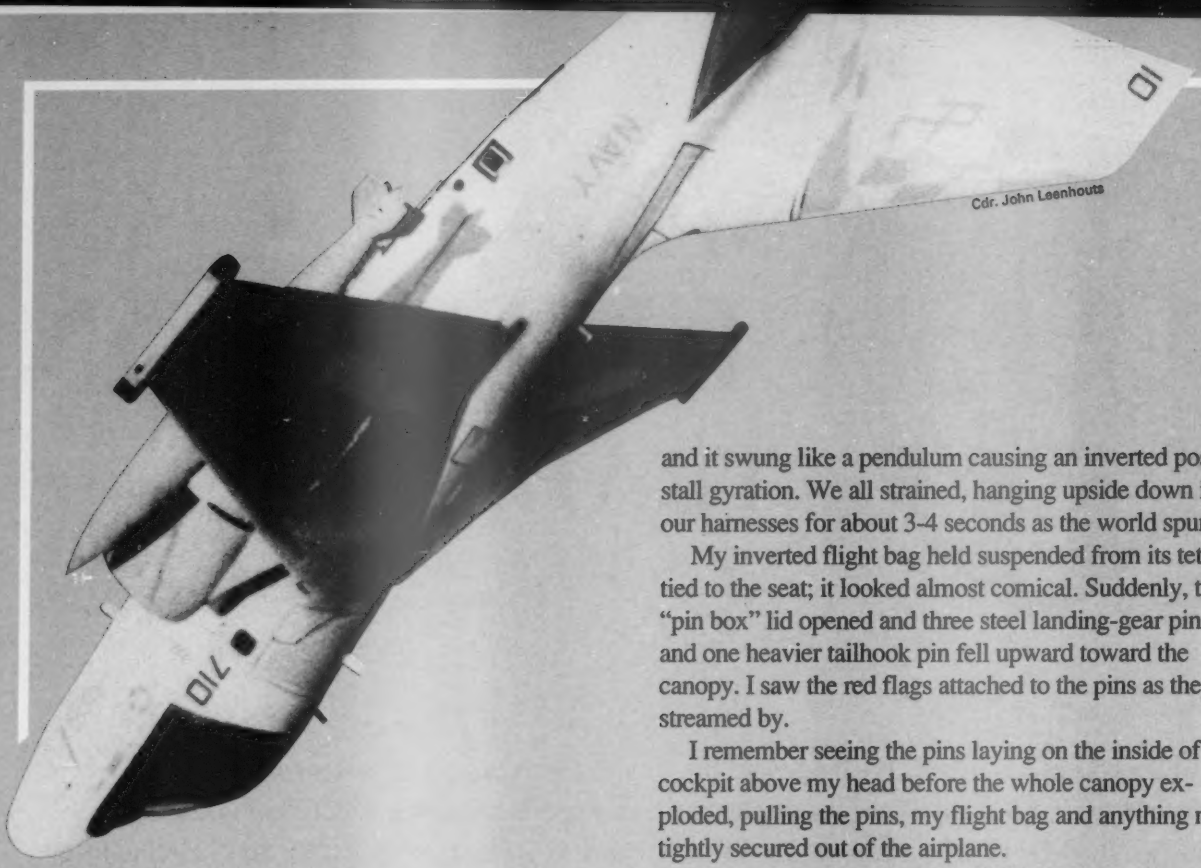
A night tanker hop on a yo-yo cycle is exciting enough without a bunch of gremlins running around, but I was a player . Transfer complete and dumping fuel. I reached up to turn the generator back on. Instead, I turn the EPP from the cruise position to the takeoff-and-land position, thus taking all but my emergency busses off line. A few more lights go out. My heart rate goes up even more, and I quickly turn the generator back on. Oh, yeah! I'm feeling real cool now.

When the dump's complete I'm at a mile-and-a-half on my approach. It was a little late to think about warming up the boxes for the automatic carrier landing system (ACLS) or instrument carrier landing system (ICLS). You've got to love these Mode 3 approaches. It seems a little darker down there than at launch time. Those clouds seem a little lower, too. I launched off the pointy end feeling like a real fleet dude, but now my plane is at three-quarters of a mile, but I'm at three miles feeling like it was my first night trap. And, as could be expected, I bolter.

Somewhere on downwind, I catch up with the plane, catch my breath, turn all the right boxes on, and calm down. The next pass went much better, and I trap. Number 100!

I had set myself up for a humbling experience, not necessarily life-threatening, but definitely ego-balancing. All it cost me was some ribbing in the ready room about boltering on what was supposed to be my 100th trap. What I gained was a valuable lesson or two—not a bad exchange rate. ◀

Lt Duggan flew A-7Es with VA-27. He recently transitioned to the F/A-18 as the squadron became VFA-27.



Cdr. John Leenhouts

It Just Blew

By Lt. Gus Conklin

It was my first NATOPS check in the S-3A and I was in the TACCO seat. Another NFO was in the front taking his flight eval. We planned on switching positions half-way through the hop to complete the evals. After launch, we entered W-291 near San Clemente Island.

Thirty minutes into the flight, the COTAC and I stowed loose gear to prepare for unusual-attitude flight. We stowed our flight bags, and locked our harnesses. The first maneuver was a post-stall gyration in which the COTAC talks the pilot through the recovery.

The pilot pulled power to idle and raised the nose until the aircraft shuddered and stalled. He held the stick full back momentarily to produce the gyration and the nose fell off to the left. The plane quickly went nose down and began spiraling to the left. The nose felt heavy and it swung like a pendulum causing an inverted post-stall gyration. We all strained, hanging upside down in our harnesses for about 3-4 seconds as the world spun.

My inverted flight bag held suspended from its tether tied to the seat; it looked almost comical. Suddenly, the "pin box" lid opened and three steel landing-gear pins and one heavier tailhook pin fell upward toward the canopy. I saw the red flags attached to the pins as they streamed by.

I remember seeing the pins laying on the inside of the cockpit above my head before the whole canopy exploded, pulling the pins, my flight bag and anything not tightly secured out of the airplane.

We were at approximately 18,000 feet over the ocean and still partially inverted. The pilot quickly recovered from the maneuver and looked back to see what was happening. Plastic interior siding was torn from the cockpit and what was not wrapped around me was sucked out the now-gaping hole above my head.

Looking up, I could only see blue ocean spinning around and I thought momentarily, "Do I need to eject?" A quick evaluation of the situation made it clear that the aircraft was recoverable and that I should wait. As soon as the pilot recovered, I went through the cracked-canopy emergency procedures and put on my oxygen mask. The wind roaring through the cockpit made it impossible for us to communicate on our boom mikes. Fortunately, we were able to talk using the microphones in our oxygen masks. We returned to homeplate without further incident.

The pins cracked the thin TACCO canopy and the pressurized cockpit simply forced the plexiglas into the wind stream. The lid of the pin box was found to have a loose-fitting latch that opened easily. Now, I always preflight the pin box and make sure the ground crew secures the latch tightly before closing the hatch. ◄

Lt. Conklin is an NFO with VS-38.

So, Granny, How Do You Like Flying, So Far?

By Lt. Gary D. Brose

What is the not-so-secret wish of every flight student in the training command? Why, to demonstrate their mastery of the airways to their friends and relatives as soon, and as dramatically, as possible. Is it possible in this situation for ego to call "shotgun" over common sense, thus relegating reason to the back seat? Consider this ensign's tale.

It was a great way to start summer vacation: shiny gold wings on his chest and a temporary commercial pilot's license in his wallet. He got his first choice of orders and three weeks to get intimate with his new high-performance autobahn cruiser on a cross-country drive to surf heaven. Even better was a chance to stop off and visit some distant relatives that he seldom got to see.

While in the wide open spaces of the midwest, he didn't see any reason not to go ahead and spend some of that travel pay on a Cessna rental. Show his grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins where a million of their tax dollars went. In this particular midwestern town, where there were more small cropduster airports than tattoos on a BM3, getting checked out in a top-of-the-line Cessna 172 was easier than snagging a tie-dye t-shirt at a Grateful Dead show.

He walked through the hangar door and told the good Republican behind the counter that he was a Naval Aviator with a commercial pilot's license. The man was sutiably impressed and our intrepid aviator spent more time listening to war stories than in the landing pattern. After 30 minutes of flight time and five landings, our hero was a qualified Cessna driver.

A quick quiz for those of you who don't hold this coveted qual.

—What is the stall speed of a 172? Answer: when the airframe starts to buffet.

—What are your single-engine air restart procedures? Answer: keep twisting that key!

— What are your max-range-minimum-rate-of-descent airspeeds? Answer: who cares on a VFR flight in VMC!

When did this young aviator feel the first guilt pangs for venturing from two years of ritualistic preflight planning? Or for not asking the right questions? Or for being in such a hurry to take off, now that he had *gotten home*? Not until he looked around the cabin and saw the gentle, smiling faces of his grandmother and aunt, and the complete trust demonstrated by his two young cousins jumping up and down in the back seat like they were in the family truckster headed for Wally World.

Only then did he realize the depth of his responsibilities as pilot in command. There would be no omniscient instructor to bail him out if he screwed up. Fortunately, he didn't need one. Like thousands of private pilots who survive more by raw talent and luck than intelligence, he had a more or less uneventful flight. The FAA envelope in his parent's mailbox a month later wasn't a flight violation for flying too low over the stock car races; it was his permanent license.

Postflight analysis revealed that his uncle in the back seat wasn't bored, just airsick. So the wingovers he performed to break the monotony probably weren't necessary. Most importantly, that flight taught him more about PIC responsibilities than all of the solo hops in the training command. ◄

Lt. Brose is an H-60 pilot with HSL-47.

Surfing Tomcat

By LCdr. J.P. Widay

As we returned from the op area, we dialed up ATIS, expecting to hear a weather report like the one we had when we launched: 3,500 broken, 8,000 broken, visibility 5 miles. Instead, we got visibility half a mile in driving rain—something a little more challenging. We would have to shoot a precision approach.

My pilot and I discussed procedures and the chance of not breaking out at the missed-approach point. We had plenty of gas; we could shoot more than a couple of approaches and divert if we had to. We talked about using rain removal and antiskid, but much to my chagrin, my pilot said, "Antiskid BIT check was bad. The antiskid is inop."

"No problem for this cruise-experienced driver," I thought. "We'll listen for braking action reports, stay off the brakes until we need them, use the entire runway and the long-field gear." We discussed our options and felt confident that we could

land safely.

Our first approach went well. The controller gave us a precise Mode III, and our deviations were only minor. We broke out of the goo at about 3,000 feet, but the visibility was as advertised. We looked down and saw the ground below us, but the driving rain made it hard to see anything in front. We were approaching the missed-approach point when I started picking up the airfield and runway out the side of the canopy. Unfortunately, the rain still prevented my pilot from seeing much on the nose. At the missed-approach point, I asked if he had the runway in sight and he said, "No, I'm waving it off!". We executed a missed approach and discussed our game plan for the next time. Instead of looking directly out in front, I told the pilot to use the peripheral view.

Our second approach went like the first—good, solid GCA calls, minor deviations, driving rain all the way to the missed-approach point. This time, however, we both saw the runway and continued the approach to touchdown. Previous pilots had reported fair braking action on the runway. No problem for a 24-ton machine on tricycle landing gear, right?

Passing through 80 knots, the deceleration didn't feel quite right and suddenly, the nose drifted about 20 degrees off runway heading as the aircraft continued down the runway. My call to come right probably insulted my pilot. He was working his tail off trying to get the plane pointed straight. It was like riding a surfboard with no tail fin–just slippin' and slidin!

The pilot did an outstanding job of using small, coordinated rudder-and-brake inputs to straighten the aircraft out. After what seemed like an eternity, the nose came back to runway heading and we used all 12,000 feet to stop. We were both breathing hard as the tower asked for a braking report.

"Very poor!" I quickly replied.

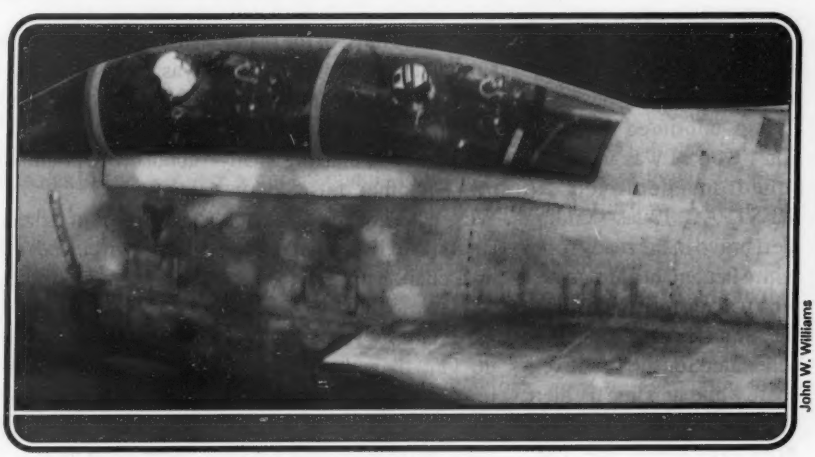
Interestingly, the next aircraft that landed—another Tomcat—reported good braking action. I should have asked him if his antiskid was working.

Braking-action reports are not a quiz from the tower on your braking techniques. Reporting poor braking action is no reflection on how good a pilot you are. The braking-action report is meant for those other aircraft whose braking systems may be less capable or a bit squirrely on wet surfaces. A pilot's decision on whether to trap or roll out can be based on your report.

If you're airborne and aren't sure, or don't trust the guy in front of you, take a trap. Hydroplaning off the side of the runway isn't any fun. ◄

LCdr. Widay is a RIO with VF-111.

He was working his tail off trying to get the plane pointed straight. It was like riding a surfboard with no tail fin–just slippin' and slidin'!



John W. Williams

Blue Death Raining On Me

By LCdr. Steve Riker

During my first tour as a nugget RIO, I learned a valuable lesson in the basics of flying: unbriefed missions don't work. I was in an F-4 squadron deployed to WESTPAC. I was standing alert bravo in the ready room with a lieutenant commander who had recently reported to the squadron. I was also scheduled for the first-event spare while standing the alert.

Before the event-one brief concluded, the 1MC rang out. "Launch the alert bravo!" We scrubbed the first event since most of the ready aircraft launched on alert. We got airborne and headed out on our vector only to find that we were chasing shadows—another false alarm. We got the chance to tank on station. An F-4 never passed up a chance for gas.

Not long after we finished tanking, strike 'fessed up that there had been no hostile hordes inbound and we could return to a ready deck. With gas to spare and a ready deck on arrival, we felt like kids in a candy store. We were a single CAP and there was no one to play with, so we had to come up with another gameplan to expend about 6,000 pounds of "training fuel."

My pilot asked if I had ever checked out the Scarborough Shoals target.

"Well, er, no," I replied. "Wasn't that scheduled for the A-7s on event one?"

"Yeah, but event one was scrubbed. The target's not being used now."

So, off we went. I prided myself on being able to actually make the F-4's antiquated navigation computer work, and I directed us to the target.

As we approached Scarborough Shoals, skimming along at 500 knots, I saw the target through the pilot's quarter panel. Holy cow! There were Mk-76s falling all over the place! The odds were in our favor that day and we passed through the small puffs of smoke unscathed. As we climbed out, we heard our first guard call.

"Attention, attention, Scarborough Shoals target is hot for inert high-angle deliveries for the next five minutes."

It was very quiet in our cockpit as we headed home straight and level at a safe 16,000 feet. We recovered and considered ourselves extremely lucky. What had happened was that a section of A-7s, loaded with Mk-76s, was launched with the alert. When the alert was cancelled, the A-7 lead figured that since they had the target scheduled anyway, and the ordnance, they might as well get in a few good passes. They first saw us as they began looking for their hits, which I can attest, weren't bad at all.

I'm a little older and (I hope) a lot wiser now. I had an up-close and personal demonstration of how bad things can be if you improvise in the air instead of planning on deck. ◄

LCdr. Riker is an F-14 RIO with VF-1.

Lost Comm? No Big Deal

By Lt. Greg Goebel

It was a typically clear summer day at NAS Chase. I was scheduled to fly a T-2 FAM with the TRAWING commodore. This was great news and I was excited since the gouge was that he *was* a great guy to fly with and you could rack up a couple of "aboves" if you paid close attention to him.

After we briefed, I began to find that the information about the commodore was quite accurate; he was a great guy to fly with. Of course, there was no doubt who was in charge and it was clear that I had better follow his directions to the letter. The hop went well and the commodore seemed pleased. During the return to base, our radio seemed a little scratchy, not unusual for a T-2. He didn't seem concerned so I didn't worry, either. I had more important things to be concerned about—landing!

On our first touch-and-go, the radio died. Lost-comm procedures immediately raced through my head: wing rock on downwind, flash the landing light, use the PRC-90, look for a green light from the tower, and land on the inboard runway. Being a typical student in an early FAM hop, I found myself well behind the aircraft by the 180. Suddenly, the commodore asked me if I intended to turn base "sometime today."

He told me not to worry about the radio failure; "just land on the inboard runway *this pass*," he said.

I wasn't going to argue with him about procedures. This man had more years as an aviator than I probably had as a human being! And besides, I wanted the "aboves." I flew a pretty good pass and was feeling good about the approach until I was at about 100 feet when I suddenly saw a yellow truck about 2,000 feet down the runway.

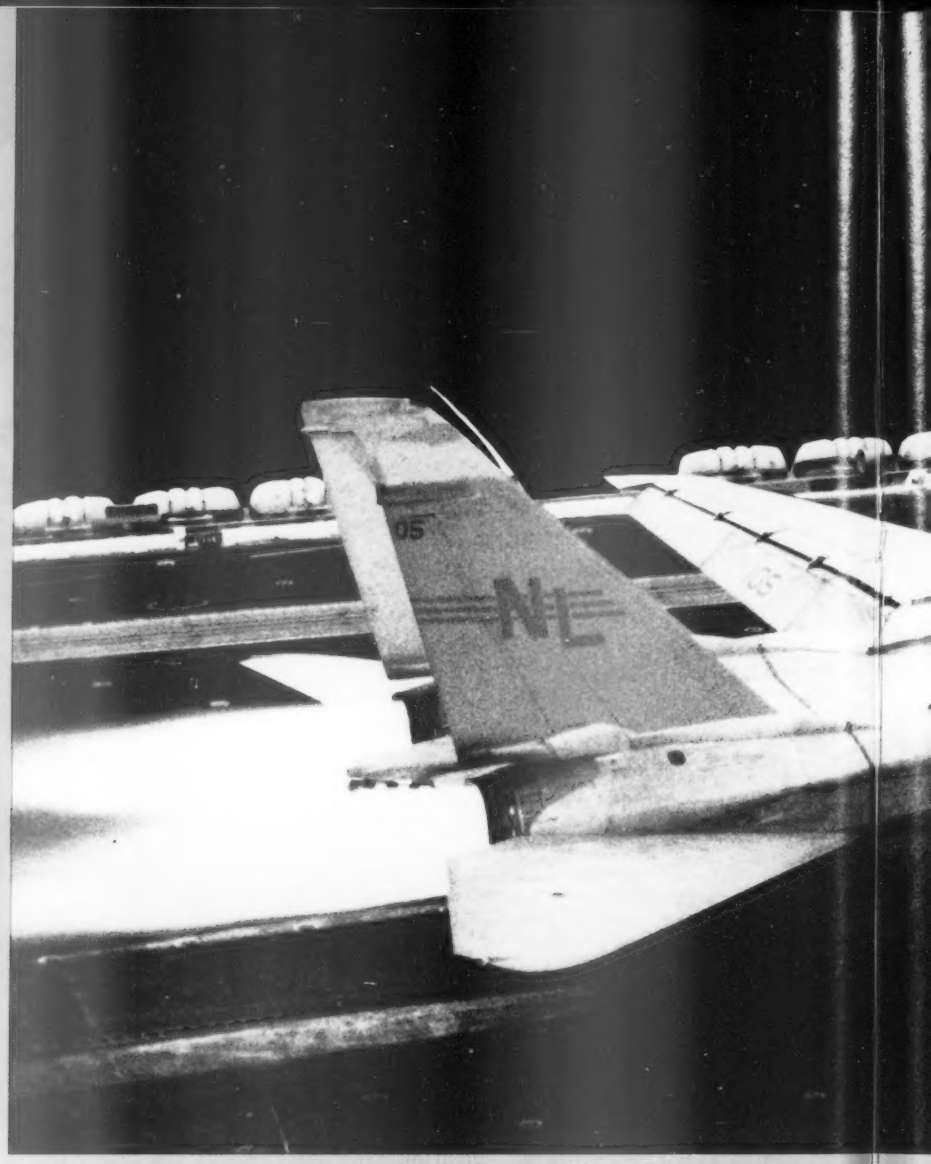
Needless to say, I took it around. As we climbed from the waveoff, the commodore excitedly asked me why I had gone around. When I told him about the truck, he realized the error we had both made. Ignoring standard lost-comm procedures had set us up for a mishap. It was the classic case of a student blindly following instructions, *assuming* that the instructor had everything under control which wasn't the case.

Next time on downwind, we went through all the appropriate procedures and landed with a green light from the tower. During our debrief, we discussed the mistakes we had made and I came away with a valuable lesson. Whenever you see something procedurally wrong, *speak up*, even if it is to someone with thousands of hours experience. Break the chain. It may save your life. ◀

Lt. Goebel is an A-6 pilot with VA-95.

Dark Night, Cold Cat, Silk Chute

By Lt. James M. Qualls



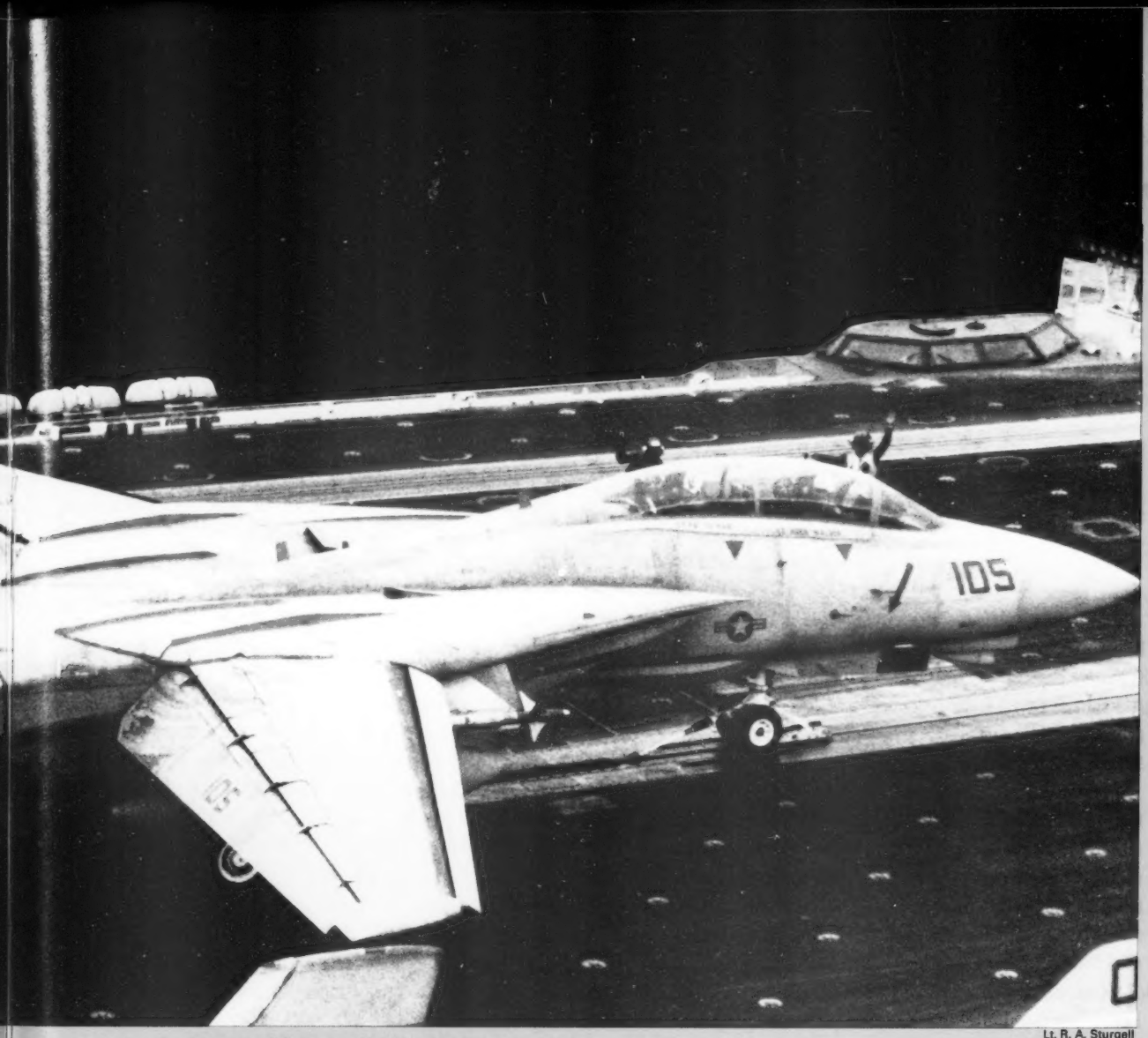
Nothing causes a Naval Aviator more anxiety than flying off the ship at night and coming back for a night trap. Our night AIC hop during a REFTRA was no exception.

We were spotted with our tail over the LSO platform so I anticipated a shot from the waist catapult. Sure enough, we pulled forward, spun around and into the box on the ever-popular cat 4. We spread the wings, made the nose strut kneel, and dropped the flaps. I looked up. No moon, no stars, just a black hole to fly into. "Why didn't I take that job managing my neighborhood burger joint?" I thought.

I ran through the takeoff sequence: take tension, wipe out the controls, looks good. Light the burners, zone 5, lights on. "Here we go!" I thought. We could feel the shuttle lunge forward, but just then, my RIO and I felt something give. We were now under the power of just our two TF-30 engines which would have been OK ashore, but with only 250 feet of flight deck we knew we weren't going flying.

I immediately took the aircraft out of burner, went to idle, and jumped on the binders.

"I think I can stop," I called. The deck edge got closer. "I've got to come right to have enough room to stop." The nose wouldn't turn. It was



Lt. R. A. Sturgell

slipping on the cat track. As we approached the deck edge, we heard the dreaded, "Eject! Eject! Eject!." With a profound expletive, my RIO pulled his lower ejection handle.

As the canopy left the aircraft and our seats fired, the nose was starting to turn to the right. I felt my chute open and I reached for the beaded handles to inflate my LPA. Within seconds, I landed on the flight deck just aft of JBD No. 1. My RIO was also lucky enough to land on the island, suspended in midair as his chute caught on the signal bridge!

Looking at a tape, I figured that there were just six seconds between the shot and the ejection. That's not a lot of time to decide what you have to do. However, if you ever have a bad cat shot, and the launch bar and shuttle part company—as was the case in this incident—you'll know it.

Your first concern is to stop the aircraft if you can. Also, you have to evaluate whether you have enough flight deck in front of you to stop. Despite the fact that our F-14 made a miraculous 90-degree turn and stopped, we couldn't count on that happening. So my RIO and I joined the Martin-Baker Flying Club. ◀

Lt. Qualls is an F-14 pilot with VF-31.

The BECO Gets a Shiner

By Lt. Eric Mueller

I have an unofficial collateral duty called "BECO"—black-eye control officer. I make sure that any high-vis faux pas does not go unnoticed. I even have a rubber stamp that says "BECO Approved." I use it on memos to the offending officer. Here's the story of how the BECO got a real shiner.

It all began as a weekend good deal: taking the Prowler to my hometown for static display during the annual airshow. Everything was blessed by the skipper and the wing. It was a golden opportunity to show off the Navy and my plane to my family and the public. As a newly designated mission commander, I wanted to make sure all went well.

Because the airshow was to be held at an inactive Air Force Base, there were no facilities. Although the tower was closed, a temporary one would be active during the airshow. I arranged for a starting unit from another nearby AFB and planned to land with enough fuel to get to NAS Alameda after the airshow. The airshow field had long since been abandoned, so FOD was a major concern.

After a thorough brief, we decided to tow the aircraft from the static display area and start the engine closer to the runway so that we could minimize the FOD hazard. Things went downhill from there.

First, the USAF unit was too weak to start the E-2 that was ahead of us. Thinking it might be strong enough to start our jet, we decided to try it rather than wait for two hours for a Navy start-cart to be airlifted from Alameda. But, we had to act quickly if we wanted the ground crew to start us first. I went to file while the pilot and the frontseater (ECMO-1) preflighted. Luckily, the huffer was good and the start was normal.

The tower cleared us for takeoff. I was proud of our bird and excited at the thought of my friends watching our launch. Those happy thoughts quickly dissolved when the tower called, "NG 621, your right main gear is still down!"

Sure enough, we had two up-and-locked, and one down-and-locked. We decided to delta overhead the field to sort out the problem. Almost immediately, tower began pestering us with questions and offers to help. While we appreciated their intentions, they only added to the pressure we felt.

After going through the appropriate steps in the PCL, the pilot lowered the gear and got three down-and-locked. We decided to stay dirty and fly to NAS Alameda. Tower told us to remain on their frequency while they coordinated with Bay Approach.

As we pressed on to Alameda, I worried about

I was proud of our bird and excited at the thought of my friends watching our launch.

busting the San Francisco TCA. (We still had not picked up our airborne clearance.) I mentioned my concern to the tower.

"I'll take responsibility," the controller replied. That made me feel uncomfortable because I doubted he could. The last thing we needed was a flight violation. Though we hadn't declared an emergency, tower was clearly more excited than we were. Ultimately, we called approach ourselves and got our clearance before entering the TCA.

At that time, I noticed we had done the wrong checklist. The PCL actually has two checklists under the title "Landing Gear Will Not Retract." In the heat of the battle, we mistakenly did the first checklist, "Landing Gear Handle Cannot Be Raised." After telling the front cockpit of our mistake, we quickly reviewed the correct procedure ("Landing Gear Handle Up, Indicates Unsafe") and took the precautionary field arrestment that the checklist calls for.

During the postflight inspection, we found red, sticky stains on the starboard main mount. Aha! A hydraulic leak! Although we could not find the source of the leak, we were sure that's what had happened. (Never mind that we had good hydraulic indications and all the other systems worked normally.) What else could it be?

We telephoned our maintenance department, described what had happened and confidently told them of our hypothesis. To our dismay, the airframer found it hard to believe that two landing gear worked properly while one failed to move. He sent us back to the plane for more troubleshooting.

About 15 minutes later, the pilot and ECMO-2 returned with sheepish looks. While checking the main mount, they saw that the gear pin flag was very frayed and almost gone. Enough of the flag remained, however, to see that it was just long enough to reach all of the red, sticky areas on the strut. The mystery was solved: we had somehow taken off with the right main gear pin still installed. The sticky substance was not hydraulic fluid but the residue of the red flag as it flapped against the strut in the 250-knot breeze.

Before we made the dreaded call to the squadron, we talked about how we got into this fix. Apparently, while the pilot was pulling the pins during his preflight, a civilian approached to ask about the plane. Although he sent the man away because we were about to start, the distraction was sufficient to make the pilot forget about pulling that last gear pin.

What about the other ECMOs? We all missed it because the pins are normally pulled by the pilot or the plane captain, and thus are still in place when we preflight.

Looking back, it's clear that we learned a number of important lessons. Once you begin a preflight, don't stop. If you are interrupted, start over. During a preflight, ask yourself, "Am I seeing what I want to see, or looking for what I don't want to see?"

Don't be in such a hurry to get into the PCL that you make poor decisions. In this case, the plane was flying, and we had plenty of fuel and diverts. There was no excuse for using the wrong checklist. In another situation, the consequences could have been disastrous.

Don't let ATC add to the confusion or dictate your choices. We should have been more forceful and told them what we were going to do.

Besides a little chat with the skipper, we endured a lot of ribbing from our squadron mates when we returned. We received samples of gear pins taped to the wall and four memos, complete with my stamp, from the "Acting BECO." ◀

Lt. Mueller is an ECMO with VAQ-138.

Left to right: Lt. Karl Christensen, Lt. Seamus O'Brien, Lt. Graham Barker

Lt. Seamus O'Brien
Lt. Karl Christensen
Lt. Graham Barker
VAQ-135

The crew of Raven 10 – Lt. O'Brien (pilot), Lt. Christensen (ECMO 1), and Lt. Barker (ECMO 2) – flew an FCF 12 miles northwest of NAS Whidbey Island. During the 5,000-foot checks with flaps and slats extended, they checked the APC system. After completing the checks, Lt. O'Brien could not turn off the APC power because of a short in the control box.

When the pilot tried to put the APC switch on standby, the control box short retarded the throttles to idle. Lt. O'Brien quickly responded by forcing the throttles to military and tried to disengage the APC by turning on the throttle friction, and by exerting force on the throttles. These NATOPS procedures for disengaging the APC did not work, however. The engine rpm fluctuated uncontrollably and the EA-6B could not maintain altitude.

Lt. O'Brien turned toward home and declared an emergency. He positioned the Prowler for a precautionary approach and arrested landing. The crew decided to delay extending the landing gear until they were on short final. Extending the gear at the approach speed of 120 knots might possibly stall the aircraft at its weight and available power.

The pilot flew at 2,000 feet until he was 1.5 miles from the runway. He then extended the gear and landed just past the threshold with the aircraft rapidly approaching a stall. The aircraft engaged the short-field arresting gear and stopped on the runway.

As a result of this incident, new procedures for securing the APC such as pulling circuit breakers and deploying the RAT (Ram Air Turbine) for electrical power have been recommended. It seems that no matter how long our aircraft have been around, we continue to find small problems that have the potential for disaster.– Ed.

LCdr. George Dom
VFA-82

While USS *America* (CV-66) transited the Mediterranean en route to the Red Sea, LCdr. Dom launched on a routine mission. He later called the tower for clearance to make a fly-by. After receiving the OK, he flew up the ship's port side from stern to bow.

At 550 knots and 500 feet, he started a right turn across the carrier's bow. The mini boss saw what seemed to be chaff coming from the F/A-18. The Hornet made four loaded rolls, each one rapidly decreasing in altitude. It quickly became evident that what was thought to be chaff were actually parts of the flap falling off the aircraft. Eventually, the entire right leading-edge flap was gone.

LCdr. Dom had begun his turn before the flap started disintegrating. With the starboard flap gone, the Hornet went into an uncommanded roll. The pilot pulled back on the stick to stop his loss of altitude and to try to neutralize the roll. The increase in back-stick only aggravated the roll and the aircraft made the four rolls.

With his altitude decreasing, LCdr. Dom had to quickly decide whether to eject at high speed and low altitude, or stay with his aircraft. As he passed through wings level during the last roll, he unloaded the aircraft, trying to reduce the angle of attack and stop the rolls. He succeeded and recovered using only enough back-stick to bottom out at 32 feet. The entire sequence took only a few seconds.

LCdr. Dom landed safely at NAS Sigonella. His Hornet had no right leading-edge flap. Flap debris had damaged both vertical stabilators.

BRAVO ZULU

Left to right: IstLt. Mark Rullman, USMC; IstLt. Tom Matkin, USMC

1stLt. Mark Rullman, USMC
1stLt. Tom Matkin, USMC
HMLA-269

During a maintenance check flight for their AH-1T's hot-oil transmission light, 1stLt. Rullman (HAC) and 1stLt. Matkin (copilot) felt collective binding on their approach to USS *Nassau* (LHA-4). The pilot could only pull 39 percent of the transmission torque when he waved off. Since the emergency occurred 30 minutes after launch, the Cobra was too heavy to hover in ground effect at 54 percent.

1stLt. Rullman declared an emergency and asked for a straight-in approach up the stern to a sliding landing on the LHA. *Nassau's* flight deck crew and crewmen from VMA-331 quickly moved three AV-8Bs from their aft spots to provide clearance for the Cobra's approach.

After a practice approach to assure controllability and to confirm variable deck winds at three knots, the Cobra crew turned crosswind and got their second emergency indication: a transmission chip light.

1stLt. Rullman told the tower and got clearance to land, while 1stLt. Matkin maintained 40 knots on a shallow glideslope. After crossing the stern, 1stLt. Rullman landed on spot six with a two-foot slide.

Inspection revealed bearing chips in the sump chip detector and internal oil filter. The collective binding was caused by the the droop-cam bell crank rubbing against a bracket.

LCdr. Joe Edwards
Lt. Robert Garrity
VF-142

Ghostrider 211 had just launched from USS *Dwight D. Eisenhower* (CVN-69) for the CQ phase of REFTRA. The wipeout and cat shot were normal, but as LCdr. Edwards (pilot) pushed the stick forward to level off, its travel was severely restricted. Through judicious use of throttle, stick and rudder, he was able to maintain a safe attitude.

After declaring an emergency, the crew checked controllability at high altitude. The flight controls were binding in only the forward-stick position.

Based on the checks and their experience, the crew decided to return to the ship instead of diverting. Following an extended straight-in approach, LCdr. Edwards made an OK 3-wire.

The postflight inspection revealed a jammed control rod.

Left to right: Lt. Robert Garrity, LCdr. Joe Edwards

John W. Williams

Watch Your Head Jumping Into the Alert 15

By Lt. F.A. Bednarski

We were several days out from the Philippines, transiting the Western Pacific en route to San Diego. The ship was making good time and folks were starting to think about their families back home. We had left all the excitement of Desert Shield behind us in the Gulf of Oman. We had met that challenge on short notice, done well, and now it was back to ops normal.

My crew was the alert 15 rescue helo; we always took this responsibility very seriously and conducted thorough briefs. We expected to launch at any time, and that it would be anything but routine.

We checked the book in Maintenance Control—nothing unusual, a lot of corrosion gripes—and walked up to the roof to preflight our SH-3. It was early evening, still enough light to get a good look at everything before strapping in, running through the checklist and setting the bird up for a quick launch. If we needed to go, we wanted to be able to jump in, start one, then two, engage the rotors, pull chocks and go. The alert was set and we retired to the ready room.

I was looking forward to slacking off for the next three hours. I planned to catch the evening flick until 2100, then stand down from my alert 15 duties and let the alert 30 crew take over for the night.

Postcruise paperwork was starting to flow and I needed a break. I started thinking about Lt. Dangerboy in one of the first "Brownshoes in Action," and how he had a similar situation involving enlisted evals. He had handled it badly; I would not. I was determined to stay focused on being part of the alert crew.

Unfortunately, the ready room was busy. The XO and some of the boys were conducting a "lynching" (H2P board). My HAC, the NATOPS Officer, was part

of it and he scampered off with a frenzied grin.

"If the alert goes, meet me at the bird," he said as I was banished to spend the alert in my stateroom with my paperwork.

Let's see. "Petty Officer Metalbender is a good dude with 4.0 potential and..."

"Man overboard! Man overboard!" The 1MC blared its warning. It was show time, and I was on!

I ran to the ready room like a salmon swimming upstream, against a tide of people trying to get to their muster stations. I grabbed my helmet—I was already in the rest of my gear—and told the SDO I was on my way.

"Your HAC's up there waiting for you," he yelled at me as I shot through the door.

"Great!" I thought. "We'll be off in 10 minutes and then, it'll be hero time." My heart was pumping as I bounded up the port catwalk and dashed into the bird. Like jumping on a bronco, I leapt into the left seat, not bothering to strap in yet.

The HAC was ready to turn engine one. "Starter's engaged, oil pressure, boost pumps, ground idle...good start!"

I strapped in, turned on the radios, and we were ready to turn engine two.

"Fuel switch, starter, oil pressure, boost pumps, ground idle...hot start!"

We hit zone five, judging by the five-foot flame that came out of the starboard engine, fully visible for all to see on the PLAT!

"What did you see?" the HAC asked.

"1050," I answered.

"Yeah, I think we're down."

"The max is 950. We toasted it," I said.

We passed the launch to the alert 30 crew who had already manned up, had started engine one, and were waiting to be spotted. They would be off the deck soon. We headed for Maintenance Control to write up a gripe sheet.

When we arrived, we learned that the pilot who had folded the blades on our bird had found the No. 2 engine's emergency throttle slightly open, less than an inch. Maybe one of us had hit it with his head while hopping into his seat. No matter what the cause, the engine had to be changed. As the Aircraft Division Officer, on a safety standdown day, I had just contracted my guys for another big job. ◀

Lt. Bednarski is an H-3 pilot with HS-8.

Who Left the Gear Handle Up?

By Lt. Kendall Geneser

PH3 Mac M. Thurston

Late night alerts in the Gulf in the middle of the summer were beginning to take their toll. Ninety degrees and 90 percent humidity, five-hour missions, around-the-clock planning, and the normal, routine paperwork in the weeks following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait were turning a vibrant bunch of aviators into zombies. It was in this catatonic state one morning at 0530 that I stumbled to the roof with just four hours of sleep.

The pilot I was replacing was in a rush to get his crew-rest, after spending the wee hours of the morning guarding our stereos. He jumped out of his aircraft and was a dot on the horizon. I peeked at the missiles, kicked the tires and climbed aboard. With heavies peering down, I thought it prudent to expedite the manup. Normally, I stand on the side of the cockpit to preflight my seat, check the appropriate circuit-breakers, the parking brake and gear handle.

However, since I wanted to push things along, I jumped right in. After all, this jet had been set up to launch for several hours, right? I did my normal wipeout, checking all the switches from left to right, and settled back. Later, with my Walkman's batteries getting low, I dozed off as the sun rose.

Some time later, I awoke to the sound of the flight deck coordinator's voice telling me that the aircraft needed to be turned.

"Are you ready for electrical?" he asked.

"Sure, why not. Lights, fire and instrument tests complete," I replied. "We're ready to start." External air was applied and I selected the start switch to the left engine.

I was surprised as I suddenly found myself looking up at the plane captain instead of down.

My only thought was, "How can you sit in a jet for more than an hour and not notice that the gear handle was in the up position?" The answer was painfully clear: I didn't do the checklist.

This story could be about a lot of things: not being alert during ground operations, the affects of fatigue, or inadequate training. The pilot before me had raised the gear handle to pump the probe out on deck, during refueling for a top-off, and had forgotten to lower the handle.

Somewhere, I, and a lot of my peers, have gotten the idea that checklists aren't always necessary; they are a crutch for someone who isn't familiar with procedures. Granted, tactical aviation demands expedience and proficiency, but we all have those attributes or we wouldn't be here. When expedience takes precedence over safety, we all need to take a second look at the way we do business. ◄

Lt. Geneser is an F-14 pilot with VF-154.

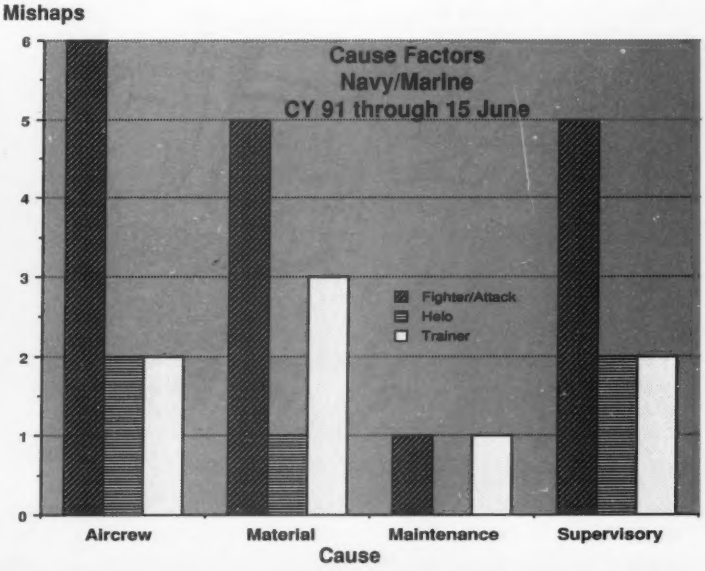
MISHAP-FREE MILESTONES

The following commands have been recognized for their achievements in Class A flight mishap-free operation:

COMMAND	DATE (1991)	HOURS	YEARS	COMMAND	DATE (1991)	HOURS	YEARS
HT-18	18 APR	500,000	11	VAQ-137	20 MAY	21,000	11
VAW-122	23 APR	36,000	17	VA-75	21 MAY	24,000	5
VT-26	25 APR	110,000	5	VC-10	22 MAY	7,000	3
VT-22	26 APR	83,000	6	VA-65	22 MAY	31,000	8
HC-1	27 APR	56,000	10	VA-85	22 MAY	19,000	4
HS-14	27 APR	4,000	1	VFC-13	24 MAY	30,000	6
NAS Pensacola	29 APR	78,000	20	VP-24	28 MAY	148,000	23
VQ-4	29 APR	213,000	19	HMT-204	30 MAY	57,000	11
VP-23	1 MAY	82,000	13	VFA-147	31 MAY	35,000	9
VX-4	8 MAY	7,000	2	HMM-265	31 MAY	8,000	2
HSL-42	8 MAY	43,000	5	VMFA-314	31 MAY	30,000	5
HC-6	9 MAY	35,000	5	HMM-268	31 MAY	27,000	5
VF-201	9 MAY	2,000	1	VP-45	2 JUN	146,000	22
VFA-113	12 MAY	74,000	17	VFA-195	3 JUN	35,000	9
VF-114	13 MAY	4,000	1	VFA-83	4 JUN	26,000	6
VMA-231	14 MAY	30,000	5	VMFA-122	4 JUN	19,000	4
VF-202	14 MAY	24,000	8	VS-21	5 JUN	10,000	3
COMFITAEW WINGPAC	17 MAY	83,000	1	VFA-151	7 JUN	10,000	2
HMH-363	19 MAY	4,000	1	NAS Dallas	10 JUN	25,000	21
				HS-4	11 JUN	31,000	10

(When reporting mishap-free milestones in a letter to NAVSAFECEN or in the message traffic, please include all of the four elements needed: command, date, hours and years. – Ed.)

PH3 Perry



	CY 91 THRU 15 JUN				CY 90 THRU 15 JUN				LAST 12 MONTHS 16 JUN 1990 THRU 15 JUN 1991				CY 90 (TOTAL YEAR)				
	NO.	RATE	DEST A/C	FATAL	NO.	RATE	DEST A/C	FATAL	NO.	RATE	DEST A/C	FATAL		NO.	RATE	DEST A/C	FATAL
NAVY	18	2.32	19	40	17	2.07	17	6	35	2.01	37	16	NAVY	34	1.96	38	15
MARINE	11	5.43	11	7	15	7.75	15	1	24	5.56	25	20	MARINE	28	7.04	32	17
NAVY/ MARINE	29	2.58	30	47	32	3.31	32	13	59	2.81	62	76	NAVY/ MARINE	62	2.94	64	43

Due to a lack of photographic contrast, this page did not reproduce well.

The pilot's story of this ejection appeared in the April '91 issue.
Here's the BN's experience.

Riding the Rocket Chair

By LCdr. David P. Brown

We left NAS Oceana for my third and last instructional flight for night vision goggles (NVGs). What began as a training flight under almost ideal conditions quickly turned into a disaster with a large explosion and fire shortly after takeoff. My pilot steered the A-6 out to sea and with three of four fire lights lit, he made a timely call to eject.

As a midshipman, I had completed the U.S. Army Airborne Paratrooper Course in 1976. I made 12 static line jumps from helicopters, C-130s and C-141s. My last jump was in 1977. I have used both the steerable and non-steerable parachutes, and I once had to use my reserve chute when my main chute malfunctioned. Even though I had training far above the normal Naval Aviator, all my previous jumps had been in a benign environment—day VFR with light winds into large, open fields.

Coming down at night into a large city was very different.

All the flight equipment that I wore that night was mine, except for the helmet. Since this was an NVG flight, I needed a helmet with an NVG bracket. The delay for the custom fit Gentex helmets was about six months. While waiting for their helmets, squadron members used a small pool of Alpha helmets for NVG flights. The helmet I wore that night was not the one I had worn previously; that one was being used by another crewman. I picked the best one but it was a little loose.

We took the runway as the moon began to rise. The skies were clear and we had unlimited visibility. Shortly after cleanup, we heard an explosion and headed for the ocean. As we approached the water, my pilot called, "Eject! Eject! Eject!" The first call brought my attention back inside the cockpit. At his second call, I straightened my back and brought my head up. On the third call, I grasped the lower handle with my right hand, grabbed my right wrist with my left hand and pulled as hard as I could.

The handle came out about three or four inches before it hit the stops. There was a short but noticeable delay before the seat fired. It started up the rails with a loud thump. My feet were pulled up and against the seat. It felt like a giant hand was on my head trying to smash me into the seatpan. The top of the seat broke the canopy.

I remember being hit by pieces of the canopy as the seat went out. There was no sensation of the rocket motor firing, just one continuous but powerful acceleration as I left the airplane.

Once outside the aircraft, I felt the wind blast. I estimate that we were travelling at about 275 knots when we ejected. There was a very loud rushing noise from the airstream, and I felt like someone had grabbed my arms and was trying to pull them behind my back. I tried to keep my arms tight against my body and hung onto the handle with all my might.

I don't remember when I separated from the seat, but at some point the handle was ripped from my hand. The airstream got underneath my helmet and tried to pull it off. The chinstrap held it in place but the strap dug in hard under my chin. The oxygen mask was pulled up on my face, almost pinching my eyes closed.

The force pulled my neck backward and it was hard to breathe. I had a sensation of tumbling. Although I couldn't see very well, I recall seeing the city lights swinging by in different directions. Everything came to an abrupt stop as the parachute opened. With the opening shock, my helmet slammed back down and my head snapped forward forcing my chin into my chest. When I looked up, the first thing I saw was my pilot about 200 feet away in his chute.

After the noise of the explosion, the engine grinding, and the wind blast, it was now dead quiet as I hung in the chute. I looked up at my canopy but couldn't see anything in the darkness. I looked down and realized that I was not going to land in the water. A strong onshore wind was blowing me back toward the city. I could tell I was low because I could already see people, cars and powerlines.

There were lights everywhere but no clear area to land. I thought about using the four-line release but I seemed to be descending much faster than I remembered on my previous jumps. Since pulling the four-line release would increase my descent rate, I decided not to use it. My decision turned out to be a good one since a line-over had ripped holes in the canopy.

The wind had now taken me away from the densely developed resort strip and the farther inland I went, the better my chances were of landing in a residential area. I removed my oxygen mask to see better.

As I got to about 500 feet, the winds shifted to the south. I was coming up on a street, and by pulling down on the front riser straps, I could parallel the street. As I came down, I thought I had a chance to escape with minimal injuries. Then I saw the powerlines.

The lines were about 40 feet high, and were one inch in diameter with 12-inch ceramic insulators. I kept drifting toward them and I decided to jettison my seatpan to avoid catching it in the wires. As I learned in jump school, I put my feet together and brought my hands up on the risers. I decided not to touch any of the powerlines.

Without thinking, I climbed up the front risers hand over hand to get away from the lines. As I got to the wires, I swung my feet back, then kicked them over my head as high as I could. I had about 10-12 knots of lateral velocity and managed to clear the highest wire. Once on the other side of the powerlines, I let go of the risers and prepared for landing.

I tried to concentrate on making a good landing fall. I made sure I flexed my legs and grabbed the upper risers. I was going 90 degrees to how I was facing, which is as good as it gets. As I touched down, I tried to evenly

distribute the impact on my feet, calves and thighs. I hit the street hard.

From my initial landing, I literally bounced off the pavement, then tumbled three or four times down the street. As I lay on the street, my first thought was that I was lying on a city street, at night, wearing dark clothing and a black helmet cover. Since I didn't want to be run over, I tried to get to my feet. It was hard because I was still somewhat dazed from the impact, and my roll down the street had badly entangled me in the shroud lines. The parachute was still about one-third inflated, so I got over to the canopy and knocked it down until it was fully collapsed. Then I dragged the chute and shroud lines out of the street.

A police car came down the street and I flagged it down. An officer called my name in while his partner checked me for injuries and helped me get out of my parachute. The man with the radio told me that my pilot had landed about a block away and asked if I wanted to go there. I said yes, and after packing the chute and my flight gear in the trunk, we drove to where the pilot had landed.

He had come down in a tree in an apartment court. I talked to him and he said he was OK. I saw a woman with a portable phone standing on a nearby porch. I borrowed the phone to call the duty office and my home. Then a base ambulance took us to the Oceana Medical Clinic.

As with any incident like this, we learned a few lessons. First, I can't overemphasize the importance of good body position during ejection; the G force is extremely high. Second, it is very important to wear properly fitted flight gear. I was lucky that I didn't break my neck because of the loose helmet. I was also not wearing flight gloves. Although I normally wear them, I didn't because of the difficulty in locking the NVGs onto the helmet while wearing gloves.

My flight gear and flight suit had some very nasty cuts and gouges in them from going through the canopy. However, my only injuries were on the exposed parts of my hands, which cost me four stitches. My pilot wore his gloves and had no cuts.

Ejection is a frightening experience. The G forces are far above those of a catapult launch. Despite this, a ride in the rocket chair is far preferable to staying with a crippled aircraft that is rapidly going down. ◄

LCdr. Brown is a BN with VA-176. On the night of his ejection he was flying with VA-42 for NVG instruction.

There was no sensation of the rocket motor firing, just one continuous but powerful acceleration...

Why Check It At the Last Minute?

PH3 Paul Hawthorne

By LCdr. B.C. Everest, Royal Navy

During a recent squadron survey, I was checking flight gear to ensure the PR was doing his job and that aircrew did not have illegally altered equipment. One particular set caused concern. All the tell-tale ties on the beaded handles of the LPU were missing and the helmet's visor cover was completely broken in half. It looked like this aviator was not particularly concerned about his equipment—which could save his life—and that he had not inspected it for some time. It also indicated how little thought and care is at times given to ALSS...until you need it.

Perhaps the greater majority of you aviators who do check your flight gear could help to educate those few who always seem to create twice as much work and problems.

Although the rules don't call for a postflight inspection, it makes sense to survey your equipment as you take off your gear. By making this quick and easy check and reporting any problems, you give your PR the time to correct any deficiencies. How can anyone expect to carry out a mission with all his ALSS equipment up to snuff if he leaves all those checks to the last minute?

If your aircraft is down, the flight is either postponed or the mission is changed. Perhaps if you are down for survival equipment, your sortie should be amended to read, "Survival not possible; no SAR required." Otherwise, you will simply blame the PRs because they couldn't cater to your last-minute checks.

Perhaps all shops should hang a shingle that says, "Lack of planning on your part does not create an emergency on mine." Even if the thought is there, however, PRs don't work that way. Their professional pride will ensure that when all else fails, your ALSS won't.

Why wait until the last minute? Check your gear after the flight.

LCdr. Everest is the Head of the Naval Safety Center's Life Support

How Many More Links

By Lt. Bill Barfield

It was a night CQ 140 miles from NAS Miramar. Off the cat, the nugget pilot asked ECMO 1 to request comfort time since the pilot had just hot-seated. Control promptly had the EA-6B switch to marshal.

"Roger, 605, marshal on the 350, 21 DME, angels 6. Say state."

"605, state 12.0."

The Prowler was one of the first to launch and one of the first to request comfort time. It soon became apparent to the crew that they would be in

PH1 William Shayka

Would You Like?

marshal for quite a while. The weather was VFR and there was a nice moon. On the horizon, the crew saw the glow of city lights from the beach. What more could one ask for during a night CQ?

After an hour in marshal, the crew finally got the call to charlie.

"605 commencing, altimeter 30.04, state 7.2."

"Roger, 605. Switch button 16, and check in."

The pilot needed two night landings to qual and tonight they would both be traps instead of a touch-and-go and a trap. The first pass was a beauty. He flew an OK pass to a 3-wire. ECMO 1 had called the ball with 6.2. Once out of the landing area, they were not sure if they would be launched again because there were three airplanes already waiting behind cat 1.

The crew had calculated their bingo fuel to be 4.4 and that meant that their holddown was 5.4. By this time, the Prowler was no. 2 behind the cat and its state was 6.0, still above hold down. The crew discussed calling the boss but decided not to as long as they were so close to launch. After all, they were just going to launch, turn downwind, then trap.

At last, the Prowler's turn came. Just as they taxied up to the shuttle, all four crewmen noticed that they couldn't breathe with their masks on. They were out of oxygen. The O_2 light on the panel had been on for some time, and although the pilot and ECMO 1 had commented when the light came on nobody did anything about it.

As the EA-6B was positioned on the shuttle, the crew quickly discussed their options. They called the Air Boss to explain the situation, but in the confusion of single-frequency CQ ops, the Boss didn't answer right away. It was time to decide—as if the choice wasn't obvious.

The pilot only needed one more trap to qual, and the boat had been under a lot of pressure to complete the CQ so it could head west on time. The squadron had also been under pressure to qual all their pilots, but only half the planes had been up.

The last point was that the lack of oxygen could only bite them if they had to bingo, and even if they did, it wouldn't be a big deal. The Prowler crew discussed all these matters as they taxied up and went into tension; they decided to go for it.

The EA-6B launched and turned downwind. The ship said to extend. ECMO 1 called the ball with 5.0. The pilot applied a little too much power, and the aircraft was high at the ramp. Bolter.

"605 airborne."

"Roger, 605, take

The pilot only needed one more trap to qual, and the boat had been under a lot of pressure to complete the CQ....

angels 1.2 at four miles, downwind approved."

"605, state 4.9."

"605, when level 1.2, downwind approved."

On the next pass, ECMO 1 called the ball with 4.3. Despite the fact that the pilot flew an OK pass, he had a hook skip.

"605 airborne, state 4.3."

"605, clean up, climb. Your signal bingo. Squawk emergency. Pigeons bear 020 for 138. Passing 2.5, switch button 8."

They'd been bitten. The 100-to-1 chance of a bingo with no oxygen had happened.

The 138-nm bingo profile for an EA-6B requires a climb to 35,000 feet. The mission commander had flown this same profile into NAS SoCal more times than he cared to remember. He knew that even with the 2,000-pound reserve that a bingo profile gives, there was no room for error—or vectors from center—and leveling off much below 35,000 feet was not an option unless the pilot became too hypoxic.

As the crew began their descent, the pilot saw that the flaps and slats had barber-poled. Whatever caused the problem, it wasn't hydraulics because the gauges showed good pressure, and the pilot did not have control problems.

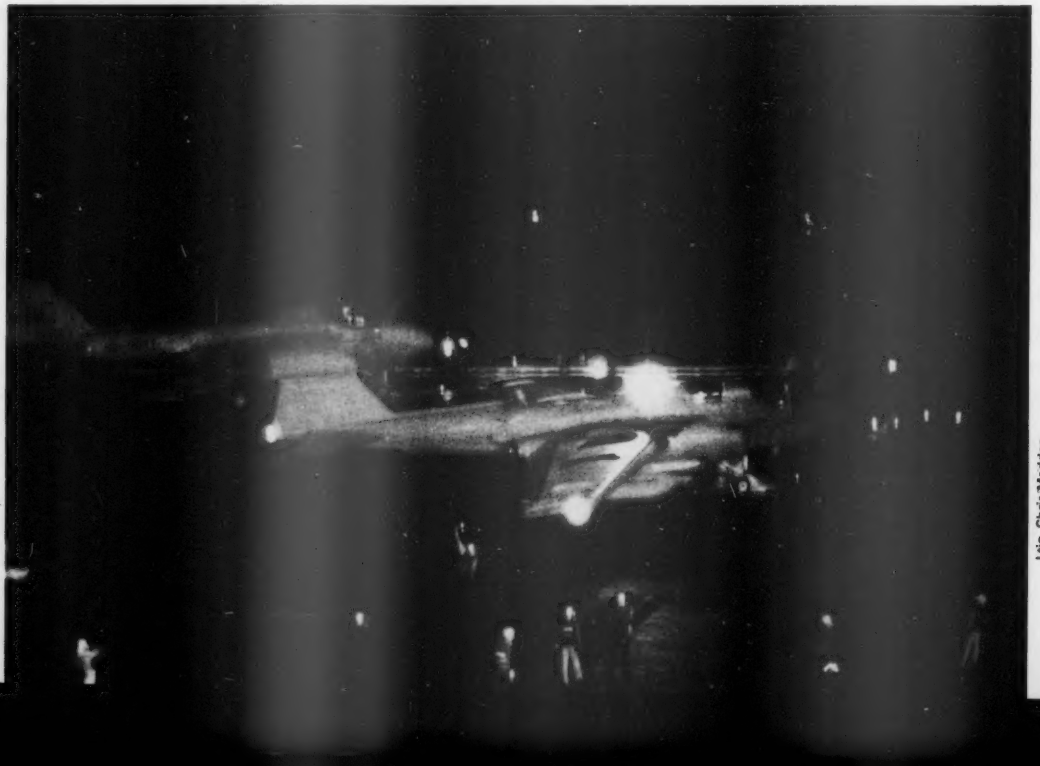
As the Prowler rolled out on final, the pilot lowered the flap lever; the flaps and slats didn't move. Then to top it off, the low-fuel light came on. When it rains, it pours.

Because of the flaps and slats indication, they had already set themselves up for a no-flap, no-slat approach to a field arrestment instead of using emergency flaps and slats. The aircraft landed and as it taxied off the runway, the field closed.

Lt. Barfield flew the EA-6B with VAQ-131.

Aviators often jokingly use the phrase "we cheated death again" after a successful flight. In this case, the phrase truly applies and it is no joke. The rules in 3710 exist to keep you alive. If you start to treat them like the FBI warning at the beginning of a videotape, you're asking for trouble.–Ed.

The O_2 light on the panel had been on for some time...



Ltjg. Chris Madden

Know your Emergency Procedures

or You May Be

Poster idea contributed by LCdr. James J. Miller

Push the limits to get the "X"?

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You just might!

Poster idea contributed by John W. Williams